

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 197 816

PS 011 905

AUTHOR Edgar, Don
 TITLE Possible Directions for an Australian Family Policy. Discussion Paper No. 1.
 INSTITUTION Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne (Australia).
 PUB DATE May 80
 NOTE 25p.: Paper presented at the Conference of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Papua, New Guinea (North Ryde, Australia, May 9-12, 1980).
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS Advantaged: Democracy: *Disadvantaged: *Economic Change: Employed Women: *Family (Sociological Unit): *Family Problems: Foreign Countries: Marriage: Social Change: *Social Characteristics: Social Influences: *Social Problems: Social Responsibility: Unemployment: Welfare Recipients
 IDENTIFIERS *Australia

ABSTRACT

Family policy makers must first understand changes taking place and factors influencing Australian society so that they can then ease the burden on the disadvantaged poor. Growing affluence, increasing de-institutionalization of women's roles, later marriage, delayed and smaller families and an elongated family life duration are among the trends in Australian family life. The major changes are related to growing affluence. Affluence, however, has been won at the expense of the under-privileged, and must be set against a counter set of social facts. Clearer family policies are needed because many families are vulnerable and live under crisis conditions. Poverty: insecurity of income: unemployment and under-employment: physical and mental illness: language barriers to participation in community life and access to assisting services: and marital conflict, separation and divorce affect vast numbers of Australian families. Despite the powerlessness of the disadvantaged, there is a further change taking place in Australian society that reflects the diversity of family types and results from healthy conflict. That change is the growth of a stronger grassroots sense of democracy than Australia has ever experienced before. A more humane, less demeaning society may become possible as cooperating individuals increasingly take responsibility for constructing social structures to serve their human purposes. (Author/RH)

 * Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
 * from the original document. *

ED197816

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS FOR
AN AUSTRALIAN FAMILY POLICY

Don Edgar

Paper presented by Dr. Edgar as the Australian Keynote address to the Conference of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, titled 'Towards a National Family Policy', held at Macquarie University, 8 - 12 May, 1980.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

*Mari Davis/Institute
of Family Studies*

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS011905

Institute of Family Studies, Discussion Paper No. 1
Melbourne, Institute of Family Studies, 1980.

Edgar, Donald Ernest.

Possible directions for an Australian family policy.

(Institute of Family Studies discussion paper; no. 1).

Paper presented to the Conference of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers of Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, titled 'Towards a National Family Policy, held at Macquarie University, 8-12 May, 1980.

Bibliography

ISBN 0 642 89962 2

1. Family - Australia. 2. Australia - Social conditions.

I. Title. (Series: Australia. Institute of Family Studies. Discussion paper; no. 1)

306.8'0994

This series of Discussion Papers is presented as a means of highlighting issues of importance to Australian families. The views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not represent an official Institute view. More detailed, research-based papers are being produced in the Institute's Working Papers series.

The major reasons why we need a national family policy, now as never before, are simple.

First, because the family unit in its varied forms has undergone remarkable change in the past few decades. As the most basic locus of forging the character and well-being of Australia's future citizens, and as the locus of the deepest and most personal life concerns of our present community, governments and their associated bureaucracies can no longer afford to act as though 'the family' is the same as it was or as they imagine they would like it to be.

Second, because social and economic changes are producing such pressures and strains on families of every kind that we need a concerted effort on the part of the community to safeguard some semblance of stability. The fact is that marital discord and breakdown are socially produced, private conflicts being the manifestations of socially generated change in well-being, sex-roles, the very nature of parenthood and childhood. The old notion that a vow for lifelong unity, and the social cement of a couple of kids will fix everything, must be discarded. A national policy could help re-educate the nation to an awareness of the social causes of private disruption.

A third reason for wanting a national family policy is the outcome of these first two reasons. Australia has, despite its general affluence, a growing number of families in poverty and in non-functioning disarray. Anyone serious about preserving the family unit and about ensuring a bearable minimum living standard for every citizen, must face up to the fact that current policies are failing to guarantee those minimum standards for many Australian families.

Fragmentation of services, inconsistency in their interpretation and application, bureaucratic dehumanization in much family service delivery all result from our tradition of tri-level government, reliance on the central bureaucracy to act as big-brother, and the professionals' refusal to recognize the local community's right and competence to act on its own behalf.

Overriding all of these, however, is the need to make people aware of how crucial the family is in forming attitudes, creating a sense of self-esteem, laying the foundations for adult competence. The family is, in my terms, 'the crucible of competence', where every person learns to know their 'place' in society, learns to perceive the world either as being malleable to their own control attempts or as standing rock solid against any attempt on their part to improve the environment they live in.

4

An Australian national family policy is not an impossible dream; it is alive and well and operating through every pore of the body politic.

It exists in the master symbols of political rhetoric. The family, motherhood, children, the home, the right to privacy and a house of one's own, are unassailable points of the democratic consensus. Both sides of the political spectrum say they will protect the family unit, boost family well-being through their proposed reforms, aim to make all families better off.

Yet the logic of preserving the family unit is incontrovertible: families are different and families are unequal, so to preserve them is to enshrine differences (a desirable pluralistic goal if we are speaking culturally) but also to crystallize and reproduce the basic structural inequalities of Australian society.

If we are to be realistic we must accept that such structured inequalities will persist and aim at something less difficult than total homogenization. The goals of family policy must build on the rhetorical consensus of motherhood/family symbols towards a clearer understanding of those differences and an acceptance of communal responsibility for every family's welfare.

We must not allow either the conservative or the radical side to ignore the complex and changing interactions between the economy and family. Nor must we permit naive catch-cries, like 'the decade of the family' to obscure the fact that the family as 'buffer zone' is increasingly vulnerable to changes beyond our control. As the Spanish sociologist Castells (1978) puts it, the family's role as the major consumption unit of society has been taken over in part by the State. Because modern industrial society produces poverty, unemployment, stress, and ill health, the use of State resources are limited by the amount of capital it may take out of the private sphere, the State must make political (ie. value) decisions concerning the kinds of services it provides. It has to decide between housing and central office buildings; freeways and local services; big hospitals and local health-care services. If Castells is right and governments restrict the growth of collective consumption, then the private sphere of home and family is unlikely to receive new State benefits. It is particularly unlikely to receive any benefits which might interfere with the structural interests of business and free enterprise capitalism.

If that is so we may expect the family as an institution to be put under greater strains; its traditional role of 'buffer zone' between the individual and the wider social structure (Berger 1979, Ch. 11) mediating 'structure' concept) will be threatened. In particular, we may expect such a trend to affect disadvantaged social groups more than others for whom the social structure provides better life chances.

There is a paradox that must be faced. Rising affluence over the past three decades has made family life more tolerable for most Australians. Yet that very affluence lies at the heart of changes in family life that many would wish to stop and it has been at the expense of rising poverty for an increasing minority of Australian families.

FAMILY TRENDS IN AUSTRALIA

If we are to discuss family policy intelligently, we need to know what the current state of family affairs is. There is no doubt that the family unit (whatever its size, shape or type) has undergone profound change in recent decades (2). Australia is still behind the USA and Sweden which seem to set the pace, but enormous demographic shifts and the changing face of economic life have already altered the picture. Moreover, as the past affects the present, so too the future impinges back on present actions, and expectations of family life in future Australia will affect responses to economic and social realities.

The major change relates to growing affluence. Despite figures of growing numbers classified as 'poor', and despite evidence of a widening 'inequality gap', we cannot understand family transformation in the western world except in the context of improved standards of living and the prospect of a better way of life for the majority of Australians. On almost any measure you care to name, Australians are better off now than they were twenty, fifty, a hundred years ago. Post-war growth, guaranteed wages, better nutrition, health care, technological aids in the home, increased leisure time, a still high level (70%) of home ownership, consumption levels, improved education, higher literacy, numeracy, technical skills and tertiary experience, all gainsay the picture of despair that might be drawn if we relied solely on welfare figures. Of course there is poverty and of course there is inequity, but most of the changes in Australian family life can be put down to a general improvement in affluence.

It is the higher material expectations generated by rising affluence and better education that explain the new expectations of marriage and of what family life should be. The family has always been the first line of support (both financial and emotional) for the individual facing the social structure. Other mediating structures (the Church, community groups, clubs, the Boy Scouts etc) may have declined in influence, but the family still nurtures, protects, feeds, teaches, bullies, restricts and opens up basic life possibilities for the individual. The family 'interprets the world' to every child, gives it a language and basic skills that make interaction with the world possible (3). The family either provides a sense of competence, of self-worth, a sense of power and of social respect; or it provides the reverse sense of incompetence, powerlessness, lack of respect and self-denigration that says your place in the world is of low status and your chances of influencing anything are limited.

In that sense the family is the key 'crucible of competence' where our children's possibilities for control are forged (4). So changes in the composition of family life and changes in the place of the family vis a vis the rest of the social structure will affect profoundly how each family forges the links by which each new individual relates to his/her social environment.

The most basic change has been the shift from a family that was sole support for large numbers to a smaller family supported by the modern welfare State. Whether conservative capitalists like it or not, the State now provides more direct help via health services, housing, child care, education, and income security provisions than ever before. The reason is simple: the modern State cannot afford to leave all these things to individual families because they do a lousy job of it. Shorter's (1975) historical description of the mythical family of old leaves no doubt that people (especially children) were badly off, poorly looked after, poorly educated and less happy when left to their own callous family environment. If you want educated, trained, healthy and loyal workers, the State must step in. And it has, to the betterment of mankind, for all the evils of bureaucracy, taxation and the inequities that are essential to the system's survival.

The family thus is no longer alone, never was alone, as an institution caring for children. Childbearing is no longer its sole or even main function. People expect marriage and the family now to satisfy individual not institutional needs, because individualism is the central ethic of modern capitalism. Companionate marriage arises because we have been taught to seek individual satisfaction, as consumers, as persons, as cogs in the machine that binds family and work together. That machine pushes emotional well-being back into the privatized world of the home so it doesn't disrupt the efficiency of economic productivity at work (5). Marriage now is a means of personal exploration and self-fulfillment, not just a legitimation of sexual and property rights, so the emotional pressures on families are greater than ever before.

But because of rising affluence and the revolution of rising expectations (not to mention of contraceptive techniques) people are now voting with their ovaries (and testes) to have fewer children. Children may be a joy, but they are also a major economic burden. They put strains on a marriage of personal exploration too. Whereas in the 1890's and 1930's economic depression caused a huge increase in contraception with consequent drops in fertility (Caldwell, 1977), now, rising affluence and the means to control fertility presage an era of smaller families, carefully timed, of childless families, of better quality care and of looser institutional ties if things do not work out as planned.

Affluence means partners can both work, can save to 'set-up' better, can postpone children until emotionally and financially ready to cope with them. They benefit from a higher standard of living, unrestricted leisure, more holidays. Their children in turn benefit and inherit an expectation of affluence, an optimism about the future that may or may not be fulfilled.

We can summarize the major trends in family formation rather briefly here.

The drop in infant mortality and improved longevity meant both increased population growth and longer years spent together as a familial social group. Yet the major trend (slightly obscured by increased marriage rates and the post World War II 'baby boom') has been declining fertility levels, not rising family size. The 'marriage revolution' of post-war decades resulted from a freer marriage market and the optimism born of rising affluence. Over 95% of women and 91% of men marry before age 45, a higher 'marriage popularity' vote than ever before in history.

Yet the 'marriage revolution' can be blamed for increasing marital breakdown and higher divorce rates. It stands to reason that many who marry are not suited to it. Add to that the fact that girls of the 'baby boom' reached maturity in the early 1960's, putting pressure on men to marry early, and you have an inevitably high divorce rate among high risk younger marrieds.

The turning-point year is 1971, not 1976 when the Family Law Courts presided over a huge backlog rush of divorces. For 1971 saw a decline in the crude marriage rate, a decline in the absolute number of marriages, and a reversal of the declining age at marriage. There is no doubt that divorce is on the increase. On 1971 rates we could expect 15% of marriages to end in divorce; on 1978 rates it could be closer to 25%; but even these are not as high as the US expected break-up rate of 40% of all marriages (Glick and Norton, 1977). The average age at divorce in Australia is 33 for women and 36 for men, roughly seven plus years after marriage.

In other words, breakdown occurs in response to the crisis points of having children and the economic burdens of caring for children. Here again there are new trends that suggest the shape of things to come and the possibility at least that divorce rates may decline.

More couples now delay having children until they are emotionally and financially 'set-up'. Divorcing women are now less fertile than the average. Of divorcing couples in 1971, 32.5% were childless; the figure in 1977 had risen to 36.3% childless. So whilst the number of children affected by divorces in 1976 reached a peak of 63,630 children, the figure dropped in 1977 to 45,150 and is likely to decline still further. This is tied of course to declining fertility in general, but reflects the more insignificant social change of delaying first births from the first 5 years to the second five years of marriage. If such trends persist, that could indicate a decline in the current divorce rate as couples allow their own relationship to mature, their finances to accumulate and their (joint) career prospects to consolidate before introducing the burden of children.

Perhaps the clearest social change related to the changes listed above is the increase in female workforce participation. Forty percent of Australian born married women worked whereas 46.4% of overseas-born women were working (6). While the reasons are still largely economic, more and more young women are seeking careers and planning their families around their work life.

Given rising costs of living and the growing 'deposit gap' for housing, this should be no surprise, except that it also represents a spread of the ethic of individualism from its previous male preserve to stain the cloth of female self-sacrifice. Our ideology has been so successful that more and more women are demanding the right to choose between home-work and work outside.

Despite equal opportunity legislation and Australia's advantage in having a separate conciliation and arbitration system, women still receive only about 60% of the male salary for equal work (P.P. McGuinness' (1980) figures notwithstanding) and their path into positions of power or senior administration is still structurally limited. In an interesting paper on Canadian women and work, Professor Don Mills (1980) suggested there had been, and was likely to be, little change. Working wives had low career prospects and still do most of the housework. Spectacular examples of househusbands and enlightened new males sharing the housework notwithstanding, the average husband of a working woman still does only thirteen percent of the housework, child-minding chores. What is more, there was no significant variation by socio-economic or educational status.

We should not be surprised at this. Old habits die hard. Changed roles bring resistance, guilt, confusion. The family of our childhood imprints sexist norms, rests in fact upon sexual differences, and its emotional impact on adult behaviour cannot be wiped out overnight. With unemployment rates rising, it is women who form the greatest number of 'hidden unemployed', the power of men both at home and in the marketplace finding exponents in the male political circus and the backlash male-dominated world of the media. My guess is, however, that education has had its effect: more young girls than ever believe they can choose something other than traditional home-making as a career. Media symbols of self-searching, self-assertion, individual freedom subtly subvert the more dominant image of fulfillment via the male. And the growth of service industries at the expense of manufacturing may serve the women's cause more than the males', though we could see a return to the male monopoly of the typewriter as it transforms into the micro-computer.

Whatever the reasons, the fact of wives and mothers working as a new norm is a significant change. Women are once again clearly, not just indirectly, 'productive', so their claim to control within the family must grow. The evidence is that working women are healthier, less tense, more satisfied with their life than the homebound. The most miserable woman is the well-educated mother stuck at home. Children of working mothers seem also to benefit rather than suffer, both economically and emotionally. Even where financial need is the reason for working, husbands and children have to recognize that the mother 'controls' the family environment in more significant ways than deciding what to eat each day. That example inevitably alters the world-view of families and sets patterns that even discriminatory unemployment cannot reverse.

Finally, the family is today increasingly a three generation entity. Myths about the lost extended family are destroyed by the figures. Whereas in 1900 people marrying could expect to live only a few years beyond the last child leaving home, we can now expect to spend five-sixths of our marriage beyond the child-bearing years and well over fifteen years after the last chicken has flown the nest. We have no studies of how grandparents now relate to family life. They may not live together in traditional 'extended' family style, but childcare, play, emotional and financial support are increasingly possible in the modern, healthy, three generation family. 'Grey power' may transform into a selfish assertion of old people's rights as the 'me-generation' grows old, but the alternate potential is there for a transformation of family life, especially as early retirement brings greater leisure opportunities for between-generation communication. In the USA the 45-64 year age group represents only twenty percent of the population, but holds fifty-three percent of discretionary income. With smaller families of their own, grandparents will play an even more significant part in the 'setting up' stages of new family formation (7).

What then do these trends add up to in terms of family futures? Growing affluence, increasing de-institutionalization of women's roles, later marriage, delayed and smaller families, and an elongated family life duration have two parallel effects. They presage a smaller family unit, with the usual crisis points reduced, so that divorce could be seen as less likely.

But alongside that trend is a vast shift in attitudes that demand more from the personal development side of marriage, require less rigid role constraints and make individual freedom in marriage more important. When we put this trend alongside growing unemployment and an uncertain future the chances for disruption increase. For affluence has been won at the expense of the under-privileged, and must be set against a counter set of social facts.

Unemployment has risen from 1.9% in 1952 to 6.7% in 1979, a peak that surpasses those of 1952, 1961 and 1972. Moreover it is structural unemployment, not merely a problem of inflation or rising oil prices or seasonal fluctuations. Manufacturing jobs fell from twenty-eight per cent to twenty-three per cent of total jobs, while the tertiary (service) industry sector grew from sixty-one to sixty-nine per cent.

Though the debate on technological change is another chicken and egg one, there can be no doubt that computers, word processors, automated teller services are also affecting jobs in the service industries. Jonathon Gershuny (1978) rather hopefully predicts that as we move beyond 'industrial' society towards what he calls a 'self-service economy', society will split into a dual economy of 'formal' employment and 'informal' employment based in the home. Technology and efficiency will dominate formal employment and should be allowed to do so at the expense of jobs. For those displaced will be taken up by 'home' computers linked with the service industry data banks and by increasing concentration on the quality of leisure.

The prospects of course for the family are again double-edged. A home based on a marriage of telephone and computer, of view-data and communication linkages may release us from the tight time constraints of work away from home, but it could produce a new form of isolation like that portrayed in Michael Frayn's (1968) novel 'A very private life'. Households could again become the work base but in isolation from the community, family workers becoming more inward-looking, more technology dominated and less sociable than before. Instead of standing at a factory bench or checkout register, instead of sitting in the typing pool or some other commercial context, they may be locked into the new isolation of the techno-home.

Youth unemployment is particularly high, its effect being demoralizing to the young, disrupting to their families and destructive of the future optimism on which family planning should be based. In this can be seen one of the clearest

effects of government policy on family life. Throwing a man out of work has always been (given sex role expectations) a shortcut to marital disharmony and potential divorce. Structurally blocking one of the most crucial life cycle stages for thousands of our youth throws enormous stress on family resources and emotions and alters planning for the future. So controlling inflation, while it prevents the whittling away of the value of salaries and welfare payments for families, may at the same time produce those very conditions that undermine the family as a basic unit of society. Every policy has its unintended consequences.

Part of the fallout of economic and technological change can be seen in current welfare figures. Though Philippa Smith (1980) is right in stressing that the growing welfare budget, (17.65% of total budget and 4.3% GDP in 1971, by 1971/72 up to 28% of the budget, and 8% GDP in 1978/79) has been caused largely by the shift from tax rebates to family allowances, increased unemployment benefits, growing numbers of aged beneficiaries, etc. there are significant groups of dis-advantaged families in need of assistance (9).

There are 305,075 people on unemployment benefits, 1,292,500 aged pensioners, 160,747 widows, and 62,498 supporting parents receiving support. That is, a total of 2,050,325 Australians on welfare support which for most of them represented their major source of income. War veterans cost about the same as the unemployed, draining \$910m. a year from the public purse. The aged take 40.6% of the total at a cost of \$3,624.5m., and our over 65 year old population is expected to grow by 58% in the twenty years to 1991 (10). Lone parents now represent roughly eleven per cent of all families and one in thirteen of our children spend at least part of their growing years with only one parent and with the financial hardships that status usually involves.

Incomes in Australia are, partly as a consequence, but in any event, unequal. The Rveryty Survey (Henderson 1975) found 10.2% of Australians to be 'very poor' and another 7.7% to be 'rather poor', figures that have risen with increasing unemployment. We know that the richest ten per cent of families receive 23.7% of total income before tax, giving them ten times the purchasing power of the poor (11). That is, the top five per cent of households receive more income than the bottom thirty per cent put together. We know too that wealth is just as unequally distributed and becoming more so with changes to tax and estate duty laws (Groenewegen 1972; Raskall, 1978) (12).

Thus, an increasing number of Australian families are moving away from the average - the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. We cannot expect, then, that any national family policy can talk about the 'average' or the 'normal' or the 'typical' Australian family. Our community is becoming less, not more, homogeneous, so family policy will have to accept the reality of conflicting interests, conflicting values.

The fact is that clearer family policies are needed precisely because many families do not measure up; they are vulnerable and live under crisis conditions. Poverty, insecurity of income, unemployment, under-employment, physical and mental illness, language barriers to participation in community life and access to assisting services, marital conflict, separation and divorce, affect vast numbers of Australian families. Family policy makers must first understand the changes taking place and the factors influencing Australian society so they can then ease the burden on those most vulnerable to change.

Despite the powerlessness of the disadvantaged, there is a further change taking place in Australian society that reflects the diversity of family types and results from healthy conflict. That is the growth of a stronger grassroots sense of democracy than Australia has ever experienced before. Anne Gorman's (1980) paper captures well the growth, especially in Victoria, of local community participation through decentralized decision-making. School Councils, the FACS (Family and Community Services) Committees, the Area Committees of the Country Education Project, all point to the potential for better community development and a more human locally-oriented service network.

Contrary to what Tierney and McMahon (1979) cynically describe as 'vague ideas and unfeasible roles', democratic grassroots participation in decision-making is workable, and there are signs that the more it works the more people begin to demand their rights to have a say. Individual alienation, apathy and cynicism about one's limited effectiveness decrease. Group confidence increases through group action, while too great a stress on individual action keeps people apart, in competition, in ignorance of their own inter-dependence.

A new emphasis on what I have called 'co-operative competence', building upon shared resources, may transform the isolated nature of family life in so-called communities. Particularly as conditions for many families worsen, their desire to take effective action may grow and we may well see developing a

new 'small is beautiful', participatory movement. As Anne Gorman (1980) says, 'the next political revolution in the technosocieties' may well be 'a breathtaking affirmation of popular democracy'.

Policies usually follow changes in social beliefs and values, rather than vice versa, though once a new law or policy is enacted it becomes part of the reality that affects people's perceptions of what is possible. Society is volatile and dynamic, never static, so policies are easily outmoded and must themselves be flexible. If politics is the art of expediency, there will always be an element of ad hoc-ery, but a more conscious and consistent pursuit of desirable goals is clearly possible.

The first tenet of an Australian family policy must be a recognition of the variation in family types. We must insist on policy makers identifying the likely effects of their actions on families of different size, age, economic well-being, parental composition, cultural values, context (urban, rural, suburban, inner city, etc.) and stage of the life cycle.

Family Impact Analyses must be done in the light of that family variation so that factual data are available (rather than opinion) on how government policies affect families of differing types. The Institute of Family Studies hopes to develop a systematic monitoring system to do this, using samples of families co-operatively recording shifts in their day-to-day practices and well-being.

Some principles can be held fast, regardless of change and expediency.

- families should be given every chance to lead a decent life according to their chosen values
- no family in Australia should be permitted to fall below the poverty line (however measured)
- every child deserves both economic and emotional security. If this can be gained through one caring parent rather than through two conflicting ones, support should be available to suit the circumstances
- parents should be taught how to educate our future citizens; it cannot be left to chance and we cannot assume parental competence
- any interference on the part of public authorities in family matters should be demonstrably necessary; the

onus must be on them, not on the families, to show their actions are not harmful and they are clearly beneficial

- bureaucratic means of administration must be eschewed in favour of more locally responsible and more locally accountable forms of service delivery
- power of decision-making must rest with families and their communities, not with expert authorities alone. We must 'empower the grassroots' by devising new networks of community support.
- the family must not be seen as an isolated unit, but as always being inextricably linked to broader communal structures. In a sense we need to re-publicise the family, to de-privatise meaning and the search for social understanding.

CONCLUSION

I have avoided making too many 'futures' predictions about Australian society. But the choices facing us are probably similar to the two alternative futures seen by Canada's Commission on Educational Planning (1972).

In a 'second phase industrial society' economic values might continue to put individual needs below the requirements of industry and technology. If that happened, a professional and intellectual elite would dominate; work would continue to be separate with more leisure (or at least, 'spare time') for all but the top technical and managerial positions. Work would continue to be alienating and education would remain a separate social institution focused on training and credentialling. Social unrest would grow and increased conflict over law and order would lead to repression and resistance.

Alternatively, society could become 'person-centred', putting technology at the service of human needs. In that event, needs rather than the market system would determine distribution, people would participate more in decision-making, and the distinctions between work, leisure and education would break down. As a result, education would become more central to society and lifelong learning would reduce alienation and the rigidities of grading and credentialling.

The choice between the alternatives clearly rests on values and depends upon the power of vested interests. The

Canadian Commission was not optimistic that the second 'choice of futures' would be made.

In my view we can be more optimistic. The broad movement towards individual fulfilment needs a balance of co-operative care for others, but it nevertheless is more humane than the past rigid adherence to mechanical institutional roles. A demand to be treated as worthwhile human beings, to be able to exercise some control over one's environment, is a healthy outcome of growing up to be adult. Unfortunately many families provide neither the experience nor the expectation of control, so our children grow up as defective, apathetic, powerless adults.

As the nurturing cocoon for healthy growth, the family needs help towards producing competent future adults. Husband/wife relationships will be better once the right to control is distributed equally and not seen as a threat to one's partner's self-esteem. Children will grow up with a healthier sense of self-respect that will enable them to participate effectively in society if they can mature in a viable economic and emotional home environment.

Changes in institutions, including marriage and the family, should be welcomed if they mean a more human, less demeaning way of life. Social structures are always made by people to serve their human purposes. When purposes change, or the structures fail to work, new structures have to be built. Society only becomes a thing out of control when people lose their symbolic ability to construct their own lives and when they forget that what is, is there only because people have put it there.

A focus on national family policy may be one way of guaranteeing that our oldest and most important social institution, the family, is not buffeted beyond endurance by social forces that we can in fact control.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the help of Mr. Trevor Lucas, Research Assistant with the Institute of Family Studies, in preparing background materials for this paper.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the 'social production of private realities' see Edgar (1980) Ch. 3, 4 and 6.
2. Much of the discussion that follows was suggested by K. Jupp, in a confidential paper, 'The Effect of the Family Law Act 1975 on the Institution of Marriage and the Family', prepared by her for the Joint Select Committee on the Family Law Act. The inferences drawn from her discussion are, however, my own.
3. On the family's role as 'interpreter of reality' to the child, see 'The Family as Socializers', in Edgar (1980).
4. On the concept of 'competence' as control over one's environment, see Edgar (1980), passim, but especially Ch. 7 and pp. 315 - 318.
5. On 'privatization' of meaning, see Sennett (1974).
6. Labour Force Participation of Women

	Married Women	All Females
Australian Born	40.0%	44.6%
Overseas Born	46.4%	46.9%
- Italy	38.5%	39.4%
- Greece	53.9%	51.6%
- Yugoslavia	60.6%	56.7%
- Netherlands	39.9%	40.5%
- Poland	56.6%	36.8%
- U.K. & Ireland	46.2%	46.1%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1978.

7. Re. grandparental support in the USA, see Glick and Norton (1977).

8. Employment Patterns by Industry Sector

Sector and Industry	Employed Wage & Salary Earners ('000)				
	June 1971	June 1974	Oct 1977	Change June '71 to '74	Change June '74 to Oct '77
. Manufacturing	1298.9	1331.4	1142.8	+32.5	-188.6
. Mining & Quarrying	75.4	76.8	78.2	+ 1.4	+ 1.4
. Electricity, Gas, Water & Sanitary	98.7	99.6	103.2	+ 0.9	+ 3.6
. Building & Construction	395.9	404.8	354.0	+ 8.9	- 50.8
. Tertiary (Service)	2539.5	2878.9	3024.5	+339.4	+145.6
. Total	4422.2	4806.5	4716.9	+384.3	- 89.6

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1978.

9. Growing Gap Between Pensions & Poverty Line

(derived from tables in Smith (1980)).

Pensions (includes Family Allowance) - per week.

Married Couple	\$12.40 above Poverty Line
Married Couple & 2 chn.	3.70 below Poverty Line
Married Couple & 4 chn.	16.30 below Poverty Line
Lone Parent & 2 chn.	14.60 below Poverty Line
Lone Parent & 4 chn.	20.90 below Poverty Line

Growing Gap Between Pensions & Poverty Line (cont.)

Unemployment Benefits - per week.

Single, aged 16 - 17	\$37.20 below Poverty Line
Married Couple	1.50 below Poverty Line
Married Couple & 2 chn.	17.60 below Poverty Line
Married Couple & 4 chn.	30.20 below Poverty Line
Lone Parent & 2 chn.	38.85 below Poverty Line
Lone Parent & 4 chn.	45.15 below Poverty Line

- N.B. . Unemployment Benefits U18 not indexed since 1975
 . U16 Dependant Child Allowance not indexed since 1975
 . Family Allowance not indexed since June 1976
 . Prices have risen 61% from 1973 to 1980
 . Rentals have risen 75% from 1974 to 1980
 . Average duration of unemployment has risen from 7.4 weeks in Nov. 1974 to 32 weeks in Oct. 1979.
 . 44% of Unemployment Beneficiaries have been on Benefits for 6 months or more.
 . Smith's estimate is that the Family Allowance has been eroded by 40% because of inflation over the past 4 years.
 . Whereas a Pensioner gets \$7.50 a week for each additional child, and a War Widow gets \$12.50, the additional \$4 a week allowance per child for Single Parents has not increased since 1975.

10. Where Does the Money Go?

(Adapted from table in Smith (1980) p. 15.)

Beneficiaries	% Total Social Security Recipients	\$m	% Total Social Security Expenditure
Aged	45.2%	3,624.5	40.6
War Veterans	10.9	980.0	11.0
Invalids	10.0	905.9	10.1
Widows	11.6	600.2	6.7
Supporting Parents	5.8	258.0	2.9
Family Allowances	-	1,052.7	11.8
Unemployed	-	910.0	11.0

11. For a detailed exposition of (in)equality of income and wealth in Australia, see 'The Control of Resources', in Edgar (1980), Ch. 30. While there is, of course, dispute about (in)equality in Australia, and about the assertion that 'the rich get richer and the poor get poorer', the best sources of information yet available are: Podder and Kakwani (1972); Broom and Lancaster-Jones (1976); Embury and Podder (1972); and Lydall (1965).
12. Raskall (1973) uses a measure known as the Gini Coefficient of Concentration (ranging from 0 for complete equality of wealth to 1 where all wealth would be held by one person) to demonstrate the 'rich get richer' argument. In 1968 - 69 the Australian Gini Coefficient was 0.34, compared with 0.47 for India and 0.50 for Mexico where disparities of wealth were more apparent. By 1972, however, the Gini Coefficient of wealth for Australia was 0.702, which means that if two Australians were selected at random, the expected difference in their wealth holdings would be 140 per cent of average wealth (then \$10,957), or \$15,340. Raskall's figures also show that wealth increases with age, that females own far less at every age level than males, that over 60 per cent of primary producers have wealth-holdings of over \$15,000, and that professional men are eight times as likely as male factory workers to belong to the top ten per cent.
13. On the possibilities of community participation, see also Edgar (1979) and Edgar and Egan (1979).

REFERENCES

- AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (1978a), Civilian employees by industry (Cat.No.6214.0)
- AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS (1978b), The labour force, December (Cat.No.6203.0)
- AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS, General Social Survey (1980), Australian families, May 1975, AGPS, Canberra.
- BERGER, P.L. (1979) Facing up to modernity: excursions in sociology, politics and religion, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- BROOM, L. and LANCASTER -JONES, F. (1976), Opportunity and attainment in Australia, ANU Press, Canberra.
- CALDWELL, J.C. et al (1977), Towards an understanding of contemporary demographic change, ANU Press, Canberra.
- CASTELLS, M. (1978), City, class and power, Macmillan, London.
- COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL PLANNING (1972), A choice of futures: report of the Commission on Educational Planning, Queen's Printer for Cabinet Committee on Education, Edmondton, Alberta, Canada.
- EDGAR, D.E. (1979), 'What is possible?: the conceptual limits of school-community based decision-making' in 'Collected papers on rural education', La Trobe Working Papers in Sociology, No.48.
- EDGAR, D.E. (1980), Introduction to Australian society, Prentice-Hall, Sydney.
- EDGAR, D.E. and EGAN, K. (1979), Rural education overseas: some lessons to be learned, Country Education Project, Melbourne.
- EMBURY, B.L. and PODDER, N. 'Economic welfare in Australia', in P.R. WILSON ed. (1972), Australian social issues of the seventies, Butterworth, Sydney, pp.175-186.
- FRAYN, MICHAEL (1968), A very private life, Collins, London.
- GERSHUNY, J. (1978), After industrial society, Humanities Press, N.J. quoted in 'Technology and the home' (1980), Financial Review, 23 April.

- GLICK, P.C. and NORTON, A.J. (1977), Marrying, divorcing and living together in the U.S. today, Population Bulletin, 32(5).
- GORMAN, Anne (1980), 'Existing consultation and other processes for community involvement in discussion of family policy, in 'Towards a National Family Policy', National Conference, Background paper No.3.
- GROENEWEGEN, P.D. (1972), 'Consumer capitalism', in V. PLAYFORD and D.KIRSNER eds. Australian capitalism: towards a socialist critique, Pelican, Melbourne.
- HENDERSON, R.F. (1975), Poverty in Australia: first main report, Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, AGPS, Canberra.
- KENISTON, K. and The Carnegie Council on Children (1977), All our children: the American family under pressure, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York.
- LYDALL, H.F. (1965), 'The dispersion of employment income in Australia', Economic Record 41: 549-569.
- MCGUINNESS, P.P. (1980), 'Equal pay means fewer jobs', National Times 27 April, p.26.
- MILLS, D. (1980), 'The allocation of time and Canadian working women', paper delivered at Seminar, La Trobe University Sociology Department, 5 May.
- PODDER, N. and KAKWANI, N.C. (1972), 'The distribution of wealth in Australia', Review of Income and Wealth, No.1, 75-92.
- RASKALL, P. (1978), 'Who's got what in Australia: the distribution of wealth', Journal of Australian Political Economy No.2 June.
- SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL WELFARE (1979), Through a glass darkly: evaluation in Australian health and welfare services, AGPS, Canberra.
- SENNETT, R. (1974), The fall of public man, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

SHORTER, Edward (1975), The making of the modern family,
Basic Books, New York.

SMITH, Philippa (1980), Facts on social welfare, ACOSS,
Sydney.

STRETTON, H. (1974), Housing and government, (Boyer Lecture),
ABC, Sydney.

THORNES, B. and COLLARD, J. (1979), Who divorces?,
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

TIERNEY, L. and McMAHON, H. (1979), From vague ideas to
unfeasible roles, AGPS, Canberra.